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Subject: SF Chronicle Editorial: The Navy must keep its promises to clean up Hunters Point
Attachments: Editorial_ The Navy must keep its promises to clean up Hunters Point - SFChronicle.com 091818.pdf

Editorial: The Navy must keep its promises to clean up Hunters Point

Chronicle Editorial Board Sep. 17, 2018 Updated: Sep. 17, 2018 6:53 p.m.

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Aerial photos of Hunters Point Naval Shipyard showing Buildings 366 (white on left, middle) 351, above that on the right, and 411 (middle on the right) in Parcel G in San Francisco, Calif., on Tuesday, September 11, 2018. The Navy's retesting plan for Parcel G is being brought into question. When the U.S. Navy pledged to perform new soil tests at its Superfund waste site in San Francisco, the priority was "to protect the human health and the environment." But the Navy's re-testing plan is largely based on a cost-cutting report it paid a defense contractor to put together more than six years ago. What's more, the old report relies on data collected by Tetra Tech, the cleanup firm that submitted fake measurements and got caught. It essentially advocates for lowering cleanup standards and leaving more radioactivity in the ground. Multiple government agencies have now come out against the Navy's plan to re-test Parcel G, saying that it could put public health at risk if it is

not changed. Environmental experts agree and say even if the Navy listens to those agencies the plan is flawed and falls far short of what was promised in the wake of the Tetra Tech fraud revelations.

Photo: Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle

The disastrous environmental saga at the Hunters Point Shipyard keeps getting worse.

So it's all the more critical that all of San Francisco's officials — from House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi down to the members of the Board of Supervisors — insist that the U.S. Navy finally follows through on its long-running promise to thoroughly clean up the site.

The latest twist in this agonizing story is state inspectors' discovery this month of a highly radioactive object next to Parcel A, an area that had been declared safe and free of contamination for many years. Hundreds of housing units have already been built on Parcel A, the first step in a plan to transform the 500-acre Superfund site into a new neighborhood with 12,000 homes.

Despite a lengthy history of public health complaints from nearby Hunters Point residents, public officials promised area residents they had no reasons to be concerned.

Those promises aren't going to cut it any longer.

The Navy has to make this right, and making it right starts with a proper testing procedure.

Unfortunately, The Chronicle has learned that the Navy's latest retesting plan for the rest of the site may fall far short of that very basic standard.

After the shipyard cleanup mushroomed into a major scandal earlier this year — culminating in the criminal convictions of two Tetra Tech contractors for faking radiation tests — the Navy promised an outraged public that retesting efforts would provide peace of mind.

So it was disturbing to learn that the Navy's retesting plan incorporates ideas from an earlier cost-cutting effort to reduce the amount of radioactivity removed from the site. Also telling: The fact that multiple public agencies made the unusual decision to point out flaws in the Navy's plan suggests that San Francisco's leaders need to make a thorough cleanup a top priority.

This commentary is from The Chronicle's editorial board. We invite you to express your views in a letter to the editor. Please submit your letter via our online form: [SFChronicle.com/letters](https://www.sfchronicle.com/letters).

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